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COMMUNISM GAINS IN ITALY

By William Henry Chamberlin

The success of Leftist tickets in the current Italian municipal elections follows on the heels of the announcement that the Socialist and Communist parties in that country have decided to conclude a close working alliance. Like the simultaneous Communist gains in the French elections of November 10 and 24 the Leftist success in Italy is a result both of well organized and well financed Communist propaganda and of unsatisfactory and unsettled economic conditions.

The steady inflationary rise in the cost of living (food prices in Italy are about 30 times the pre-war level); an unemployment figure which ranges between two and three millions; an extremely ineffective rationing system -- all these aspects of modern Italian life are grist for the mill of the Communist agitator. It is also interesting to note that militant nationalist conservatism, as represented by the Uomo Qualunque (Common Man) Party of Guglielmo Giannini, made some substantial gains, especially in such southern cities as Naples and Palermo.

The middle-of-the-road Christian Democrats, the catchall Catholic party which came out strongest in the national election last June, lost heavily. Italy is apparently experiencing the working of two familiar laws of politics. Misery, poverty and dislocation weaken the influence of moderates and play into the hands of extremists, whether of the Left or of the Right. And the growth of Communism tends to provoke and stimulate militant anti-Communism.

The decision of the Italian Socialists to co-operate actively with the Communists represents a victory for the Socialist left wing, headed by the recently appointed Foreign Minister, Pietro Nenni, over the more moderate group represented by the President of the Constituent Assembly, Giuseppe Saragat. During a recent visit to Italy I met and talked with both these men.

Nenni advocated what has since been accomplished, a political bloc of the Socialists with the Communists and with some of the Leftist groupings, such as the Action and Republican parties. He had fought with the Spanish Republicans and is a staunch upholder of Popular Front tactics. When I asked him whether he believed that a Communist-

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dominated government would respect civil and political liberties he optimistically replied:

"Certainly, Italy is a western country and will not stand for dictatorship."

Saragat took a very different attitude, emphasizing the dependence of the Italian Communists upon Moscow and their peculiar interpretation of the word democracy. With a smile he remarked:

"Only an abyss separates us from the Communists."

At the same time Saragat recognized the strong influence of Communist ideology on the Italian workers. He attributed this partly to the single-minded devotion and fanaticism of the Communists and partly to the fact that Fascism had made anti-Communism a leading plank in its platform. As he said, it was difficult to convince the workers that Communism and Fascism possess many common characteristics.

II

The Italian political picture is as complex as a jigsaw puzzle. After the enforced uniformity of Mussolini's one-party dictatorship, Italy reverted to the familiar continental multiplicity of parties. A political directory, from Left to Right, would run as follows:

The Italian Communist Party, with Moscow-trained Palmiero Togliatti, a former Sardinian schoolmaster, as its leader, claims about two million members. It polled about four million votes in the June election and was the third party in strength in the country at that time, following the Socialists by a narrow margin. It seems to have gained in relative strength since then and in some cities is now in first place. The municipal election in Leghorn, on November 17, showed the Communists polling 59 per cent of the total vote in that city.

The Italian Communists have displayed a capacity to use even bad political cards to good advantage. Soviet support of the Yugoslav demand for Trieste, a city with an 80 per cent Italian population, has been a talking point for opponents of Communism. So has been the Soviet demand for reparations for Russia, Yugoslavia and Albania. But the Communists have made the most of the arguments that only they, through their influence with the Communist Tito and with Moscow, can get better terms as regards both Trieste and reparations. This explains attempts to by-pass the discussions of the Big Four Foreign Ministers, by initiating direct talks between Nenni, the Communist ally, and Tito.

The Socialists were a strong political force in pre-Fascist Italy. But they are divided into several divergent groups. They tend to lose strength, in Italy as in France, to the more dynamic, opportunist and unscrupulous Communists.

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The smaller groupings on the Left are the Republican and Action parties, both outspokenly anti-Monarchist and anti-Fascist, generally anti-clerical but not avowedly Marxist. They are able to combine more easily with Communists and Socialists than with the clerical Christian Democrats or the parties further to the Right.

III

The Christian Democrats, party of the Prime Minister, Alcide de Gasperi, came out as much the strongest party in the June election. They have predominated in the coalition Cabinets which have been governing Italy. But the party suffers from internal division and from lack of a clear-cut program. It is conservative in the agricultural South, progressive in the industrial North.

One of its leading intellectuals, Guido Gonella, Minister of Education, told me that the most desirable type of administration would be a combination of Christian Democrats and Socialists, without the Communists and without the more pronouncedly Right parties. Not all his party colleagues would agree with him, and only the moderate Socialists would be willing to break with the Communists and form an exclusive alliance with the Christian Democrats. So it seems doubtful whether Gonella's project of a left-of-center coalition will be realized.

More to the Right are the Liberals, who are really conservatives; the Democrats, who are really monarchists; and the dynamic Common Man Party, a very active newcomer in Italian politics. Its founder and leader, Guglielmo Giannini, whom I met in Rome, insisted that his party was not, as its opponents sometimes allege, a neo-Fascist group, but was rather devoted to the ideals of progressive liberalism.

Giannini expressed himself in favor of government by experts, not by professional politicians. He took a strong anti-Communist line, and voiced the opinion that Italy might wake up some day and find the Communists entrenched in power, as they possess secret stores of arms and money, and some of the Christian Democrat officials, whom he called compromising politicians, will not oppose them.

Discussing the possibility of a Fascist revival, Giannini said that there was little to be feared from the agitation of the former professional Fascists who have gone underground. But people sometimes made unfavorable comparisons between conditions of cleanliness, punctuality and personal security under the Mussolini regime and now. "What many people want," Giannini concluded, "is not Fascism, but order."

IV

Political antagonisms in Italy are sharper because of economic dis-

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tress and because thoughtful Italians do not see how their country will be able to earn its livelihood in the post-war world. Yet it is true that conditions have improved over the stark misery of the war years. UNRRA's contributions, of over $400,000,000, have averted downright starvation and given the country a modest start toward rehabilitation.

But UNRRA aid will come to an end in the spring of 1947. It is hard to see how Italy, already so short of coal that its industries are working at little more than half of capacity, deprived of most of its shipping, saddled with reparations obligations of almost $400,000,000, will be able to export enough to establish the foreign credits needed to pay for necessary imports in food and raw materials.

Italy's old problem of overpopulation is also acute. The 46,000,000 people who are crowded into the narrow and mountainous peninsula are more than the land can comfortably support. While Great Britain and France are short of workers, Italy suffers from unemployment. One is impressed by the number of able-bodied men who stand around in the streets of Rome and other Italian cities during working hours. The Fascist regime chose fatally wrong remedies for Italian population pressure by embarking on a series of overseas adventures. But overpopulation is nevertheless a genuine social and economic problem.

The periodic peasant seizures of uncultivated land in large estates is another cause of disturbance and unrest. With the virtually complete withdrawal of American and British forces from Italy, except in the Trieste area, and the evacuation of the Polish corps, the task of maintaining order rests upon Italian military and police forces. It remains to be seen whether they can cope with it.

A strong anti-Communist force in Italy is the Catholic Church. Most Italians are at least nominal Catholics and even Communists often ask for the rites of the Church. But the prestige of the Church is not a certain bulwark against social upheaval. There are Communist municipal councillors in Castel Gandolfo, the village in the Alban hills where the Pope retires in the summer.

Italy is now one of the outer marches of Western Civilization. It is also a cockpit of struggle between the infiltration of Communist agents and influence from the Balkans and the more or less co-ordinated American and British attempts to shore up the shaky Italian economy.

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Not Merely Gossip *A Supplement to* Human Events VOL. III, NO. 48

By Frank C. Hanighen November 27, 1946

So precarious still is Europe's hold on existence that what happens in American coal fields can spell starvation for millions, fall of governments, perhaps even revolution. As an example, it can now be revealed that just before the American coal miners left the pits, the Department of Agriculture called a secret conference on food. Experts were summoned to give an opinion as to how long Europe could hold out if the mine strike were prolonged. For, in such a case, it was clearly realized, rail shipments of food to American ports would be curtailed and the results in Europe not happy to contemplate.

Not only food but also coal exports have given rise to serious concern. Europe needs to import at least 1,000,000 tons of American coal per month. In the HUMAN EVENTS Analysis this week, Mr. Chamberlin points out that Italian industry is working only half time because of lack of coal. Before the war, Italy imported coal mainly from Britain and Germany. But now the British coal industry is too sick to export and the Morgenthau ideas have reduced the Ruhr to a low level of production. Italy must continue to import coal from the United States to avoid complete industrial paralysis which would at least cause a drastic political shift to the Left, if not outright revolution.

The French situation is less acute than the Italian, yet is quite serious. France, while producing coal again at the pre-war rate, needs all the coal which it has been importing from America, and more. Industrial shutdowns would be followed by an accelerated increase in the power of the Communist Party, now bidding for the leading role in the Government. The slight but definite increase in Communist strength registered in last Sunday's Council elections is a portent.

From the outset of the American coal crisis, other countries also began to worry. Britain does not need to import coal but is dependent on shipments from the American steel industry. Even with coal production resumed, it will take time for the American steel mills to catch up on their schedule, which would involve a setback in the British timetable of economic reconstruction. Sweden, an importer of American coal since the end of the war, has pledged a billion dollars of goods to Russia, in an effort to stave off the dangerous pressure from that Power. Such pressure might increase, with grave results to Swedish sovereignty, if Swedish factories fail to deliver. In Oslo, the Hague, Berne and other small capitals anxious study has been given to the matter of American coal production. Whatever else the coal crisis has proved, it has shown how tragically dependent on America is Western Europe today.

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In the new Republican "revolution" there will undoubtedly be an effort to restore to the states at least some of the powers which the New Deal monopolized for the Federal Government. In this course, the Republican Governor-elect of New Jersey, Alfred E. Driscoll, seems to be taking the lead. Even before his inauguration he is seeking to arouse the interest of his state's Congressional delegation in the problem of better Federal-state relationships. He would like the New Jersey Members of Congress to work for new arrangements whereby the states will assume more duties and the Federal Government will surrender some of those performed during the New Deal era. Tied in with this objective is Driscoll's desire that his state shall receive a more generous share of its tax dollar than at present, although he is quick to add that he recognizes the duty of strong states to aid those less able financially to provide essential social services.

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Thus, the New Jersey Governor-elect is trying to grapple, albeit in a very politic manner, with a problem which has increased enormously during the past 14 years and which has caused no little dissatisfaction in richer states like New Jersey. Federal grants-in-aid have been doled out to all the states in increasing proportions since 1932. But figures for the past decade show that a dozen states -- California, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Jersey, Maryland and Delaware -- receive far less in benefits than they contribute in Federal taxes. They foot 60 per cent of the Federal tax bill and get less than half the benefits. The other 36 states pay less than 40 per cent of the cost, but receive more than half the gifts. These grants-in-aid have mainly been for social security, health, education, highway construction, housing, but recent Congresses have added to this list.

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As the Chinese crisis deepens, wrangling between American Government departments over our policy towards China increases. John Carter Vincent, Chief of the State Department's Far Eastern Division, with the collaboration of Mr. Alger Hiss, also an important functionary in policy decisions, has reportedly drafted a paper for Secretary Byrnes. It recommends withdrawal of all aid to Chiang Kai-shek if General Marshall confesses failure of his mission to China. Since the objectives for which the General was originally sent to China seem more remote of attainment than ever, there has been some expectation, although no direct evidence, that the General would ask to be relieved. Mr. Vincent is considered the leader among those in the Department who take a favorable view of the Chinese Communists. His paper has been challenged by contrary recommendations from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and from dissenting elements in the State Department. The former warn that, if aid to Chiang is stopped, Russian influence in China will become predominant with consequent danger to our strategic position in the Far East. The latter point out that in such a case Moscow would control another vote in the UN Security Council.

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As it appears now, the La Follette-Monroney "streamlining Congress" Act will have a good chance of proving its value in the next session of Congress. The bill became a law in July. But, during the past three months, there has been some talk on the Hill of retaining all of the old cumbrous committees which the measure sought to reduce. The 80th Congress might legitimately decline to accept this provision, it was argued, on the ground that no Congress should be bound by the decisions of its predecessor as to its composition. But now the Republicans indicate that they will follow all the provisions to the letter.

Before the new Congress is long in session, other provisions may well be tested. The new technical corps, provided by the bill, should certainly enable the Committees on taxes and appropriations to cope with the complex matters pertaining thereto more efficiently than ever before and should provide Congress with better material to answer the arguments from the Executive.

Also, a little noticed provision of the La Follette-Monroney Act may help Congress in its fiscal efforts. Section 138 of the Act requires that the taxing and spending committees of the House and Senate confer together in order to balance spending and income; and it additionally requires that if they fail to reach such a balance Congress must formally vote a deficit. Chairman Knutson of the Ways and Means Committee reportedly feels that the pressures for economy and the responsibility for deficits -- as a result of the new procedure -- will be so concentrated and spotlighted that balancing of the budget should result.

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Some progress has been made in healing the wounds inflicted on USA-Argentine

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friendship by the Braden policy, according to reports from Buenos Aires. It is generally accepted in diplomatic circles that U. S. Ambassador George Messersmith, in the few months which he has spent in the Argentine capital, has done an excellent job and laid the foundations for rapprochement. But his work would have advanced further if he had received real co-operation from the State Department. In fact, Mr. Messersmith can hardly move forward in his constructive task unless some change is made in the Inter-American Affairs Division of the Department.

It is also reported from Buenos Aires that President Perón has decided to "go all out" in supporting Franco, a fact which can hardly please either the State Department or Messersmith. Perón has already granted the Spanish Government a food loan. But this is less helpful than it appears, since food is less a problem to the Spanish regime than is transportation. There has been virtually no replacement of railway and automotive equipment since the war started in 1939. Perón has reportedly given the Spanish Government assurance that he will grant Spain dollar credits for the purchase of rolling stock from the United States. Further, Perón has advised Madrid that he will give the present Government diplomatic backing against any foreign intervention.

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When Federal Judge Bolitha J. Laws last week dismissed the trial of 26 alleged seditionists, he probably wrote finis to a regrettable chapter in the annals of the Roosevelt era. This case was the first earnest attempt to stage a mass political trial a la Moscow in this country. The issue at the time was confused by war hysteria and by the antics of the fantastic crackpots among the defendants. And few voices were publicly raised in criticism. But there was much off-the-record comment of a nature far from complimentary to the Department of Justice.

The severe terms of Judge Laws' dismissal opinion suggest that perhaps he was expressing the general disgust of the American bench with the affair. Jurists, as well as lawyers, were privately disturbed. And on one occasion, at a private party in 1944, we heard a distinguished New Deal Justice of the Supreme Court criticize the trial, attacking the "conspiracy" idea on which it was based and what he called its political character.

The strategy behind the prosecution was clearly political. It was designed to intimidate and silence all who took a view of the war and American foreign policy different from that of the Administration. In this category were a considerable number of Republicans, but also some Democrats. The tactics were based on the "bed-fellow technique." Thus Senator X had voiced some perfectly legitimate opinion which happened to draw the applause of one of the seditionist defendants. The defendant at the same time held some quite different opinion which resembled some of the Nazi ideas. Ergo, Senator X was revealed as a Nazi, in the vicious logic of the New Deal "yellow press." Thus smeared, Senator X was inclined to cease criticism of the New Deal party line. And so were others.

Fortunately the trial foundered on the rock of American legal principles and practice. In Moscow, a defendant has no rights and is simply a puppet manipulated for the political purposes of a trial. In Washington, the defendants' lawyers exercised their right to point out the absurdities of the Government's case, thus inspiring the Washington Post's epithet "A Courtroom Farce." When the Government sought to prove that a hinterland crackpot was part of a Nazi world-wide conspiracy to cause insubordination in the American army; and when it produced, instead of direct evidence of such a conspiracy, a batch of juxtaposed clippings from American anti-Semitic sheets and Der Stuermer, the Government's case inevitably broke down on the rules of evidence. The damage which the trial did as a witch hunt was no doubt considerable. But one may draw the encouraging conclusion that it illustrated the vigor of American principles of justice and the effective resistance of our courtroom procedure to the intrusion of alien concepts and practices.

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Notes and Quotes

President George N. Schuster of Hunter College presents one of the best criticisms of the Nuremberg trials (Commonweal, November 15): "There is every reason to believe that in a Europe once more ominously threatened with communistic rule he [Goering] will live on as the hero in one sort of dream about how communism might be opposed. . . . It is not possible to exaggerate the importance of such a myth. The only way the dream of fighting fire with fire and devils with devils can be dispelled is by creating a reality inside which fire can be fought with water and devils with angels. To say the same thing in plain language: the only chance democracy has to create a reign of peace and reason is by establishing law.

"Now the trouble with Mr. Jackson's attempt to help create such a law was from the beginning that it rested upon the assumption that a war-time mirage could be trusted. That is, the court was convened in the belief that the only atrocities were nazi atrocities, and the only menace to peace was the nazi menace. At the time we applauded and so did Europe, because the memory of the horrible deeds committed by the Hitlerites was so vivid that nothing else seemed important or even interesting. But in a little while Europe began to remember that there had been other atrocities and that there was another menace. . . . Everybody still agreed that Belsen was a horrible place, and that the murders done in Auschwitz could never be satisfactorily avenged. But they also knew that massacre and forced labor in Poland and Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Eastern Germany, were likewise malignantly evil."

President Schuster, in his article, tells a story sharpened by the sequel: "At Mondorf jail a year ago I talked for two days with Goering. One of the matters we discussed was why Germany had declared war on the United States. I said that it was at least conceivable that if Hitler had gone to the Reichstag and strongly deplored the kind of attack the Japanese had made at Pearl Harbor . . . probably no more American ships would have headed for Europe until the war in the Pacific was over. Goering replied that if he believed this he would go upstairs and commit suicide. I remarked politely that in view of the precautions taken by his jailers that might be difficult. He smiled sardonically and said, 'A man can take his life any time he wants to, Herr Professor.'"

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The New York Times (November 24) editorially endorses the petition for a general amnesty, as a Christmas present, for the conscienticus objectors: "It is in accordance with examples set by nine Presidents of the United States, beginning with George Washington in 1795. The war is over. There can be no harm in generosity now toward those whose consciences forbade their taking part in it. . . .

"The private conscience is one of democracy's most precious possessions. Indeed, the liberty allowed it is a basic test of whether or not democracy exists in a nation. We believe President Truman will be amply justified and supported, even by the veterans who bore the brunt of battle, if he grants the amnesty petition."

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When General de Gaulle, drawing himself up to his full six feet six, recently launched a verbal thunderbolt against the new French Constitution, many jumped to the conclusion that the General was ambitious to seize power and become the dictator of the Fourth Republic. As it happened, the very next day, an old friend of Marshal Pétain paid a visit to the latter in the prison where he is confined. The friend asked the former head of the Vichy regime if he found his cell comfortable. "Yes," replied the Marshal, "It is all right, it's light and roomy. However, I'm not sure about the ceiling. Mind you, I'm not complaining for myself. But I'm wondering, since yesterday, if the ceilings in this jail aren't too low."

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